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## LIMITED-INCOME FAMILIES Neck-deep in maladies

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MAHMUDUL HASAN

Before the pandemic, Mujibur Rahman, a private firm employee, could provide for his family of four. He could pay for the education of his three children, make rent and even save something for a rainy day.

But in 2020, he lost his "permanent" job during the shutdown. He eventually managed a temporary job. But his struggle to make ends meet is getting tougher because of the soaring prices of essentials.

"I have to borrow about Tk 5,000 to Tk 6,000 every month. I repay those when I get my salary. But by the end of the month I am in debt again," he said.

In his old job, he used to make Tk 39,000 a month while his current salary is Tk 21,000 only.

"From transport costs to prices of essentials, I have to spend more for everything," he said, adding that he had to reduce consumption to cope.

Like him, most of the middle- and low-income people across the country are being forced to compromise on standard of living.

Contacted, Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said edible oil and several other essentials are imported and the prices of such goods have to be set in accordance with the global prices. But the prices of locally produced goods should not increase.

The global market is quite uncertain because the recovery from the pandemic has been shaky and there is growing uncertainty over the Russia Ukraine situation. The Bangladesh government should take a long term approach, he said.

The government should make policies, taking into account that the limited income people are now under tremendous pressure.

"The utility sector has governance issues and system losses. Before addressing these problems, if the government withdraws the subsidies, the burden will be on the consumers," he said.

The ministries of agriculture, food, commerce, finance, power and energy should come together to evaluate the situation and take adequate measures. But that is not happening because of a leadership vacuum.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), point-to-point inflation rose to 6.05 percent in December 2021 compared to 5.29 percent in December 2020. Food inflation went up to 5.46 percent in December 2021, as opposed to 5.34 percent in December 2020.

Non-food inflation has been unbridled since the government hiked diesel and kerosene prices in the first week of November last year,

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**FUN TIME WITH GRANDPA...** An old man finds joy as he swings his granddaughters Fatema, 11, and Rokeya, 9, in the capital's Lalbagh area yesterday. As children there don't have open spaces for recreation, they make the best of what they have, in this case a swing hanging from bamboo poles.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## What's up Tariqat's sleeve this time?

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Five years ago, the Bangladesh Tariqat Federation attracted public attention after the formation of the Election Commission because CEC KM Nurul Huda and election commissioners Rafiqul Islam and Brig Gen (retd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury were appointed as per recommendations made by the party.

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## Make names public Eminent citizens ask EC search panel for complete transparency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens yesterday suggested the search committee disclose the names of its picks for the Chief Election Commissioner and other commissioners before sending the nominations to the president.

They also suggested all the names submitted by political parties, individuals, and various professional bodies for the appointments be

made public.

Former bureaucrats, teachers, media personalities, lawyers, and business leaders gave their suggestions to the committee at meetings held at the Supreme Court Judges Lounge in two phases.

The eminent personalities later said the meetings were cordial and that they were assured the names would be revealed.

Briefing the media afterwards,

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## THANK YOU

As we celebrate our 31st anniversary, starting today with the first of our five-part supplement series -- again under Covid restrictions -- we want to thank our readers, subscribers, advertisers, contributors, patrons and well-wishers for their trust and support during this crucial period.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

RECOVERING FROM COVID,  
REINVENTING OUR FUTURE

We are pleased to present to our readers the first of our five-part 200 page special supplement series beginning today.

The first part of our five segment special series, titled "BLUEPRINT FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW",

features a collection of articles on how well Bangladesh's economy has recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges that lie ahead.

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